



# County of Fairfax, Virginia

To protect and enrich the quality of life for the people, neighborhoods and diverse communities of Fairfax County

**DATE:** December 18, 2008

**TO:** Anthony H. Griffin  
County Executive

Chairman and Members  
Board of Supervisors

**FROM:** Kevin H. Bell, Chairman  
Fairfax County Human Services Council

**SUBJECT:** Recommendations Regarding Development of the FY 2010 Budget

The Human Services Council appreciates the opportunity to provide comment and guidance on development of the FY 2010 budget. Fairfax County faces unprecedented budget challenges, the depth and scale of which continue to expand. The Council understands the ramifications of the estimated \$650 million budget shortfall and acknowledges that difficult reductions in programs are required. These reductions will result in deterioration of needed services. The Council has made a concerted effort in all our recommendations to preserve basic service levels.

The Human Services Council emphasizes how crucial county funding is for meeting **basic human needs**. Conditions of economic distress markedly increase the need for human services. While Fairfax County Government certainly feels the impact, our nonprofit community partners feel the impact even more severely, because their resources are not as deep and diverse as the county's. Look, for example, at the current plight of food banks, which are faced with increasing demand for food but are at their lowest resource ebb in nearly four decades. Frankly, the cupboard is so bare that few organizations can respond in full to aid our desperate residents.

Our dialogue this Fall with Community-Based Organizations and Boards, Authorities, and Commissions revealed the precarious state of the human services community. Examples include:

- The 167 proposed Lines of Business (LOBS) reductions in Human Services will result in elimination of critical services for those in need. The net reduction of \$49.26 million (\$53.99 million total expenditure reductions) would have provided services that are essential to the health and well-being of our community.
- The magnitude and severity of some of the proposed reductions will reverse the safety net of services that has been carefully built over many years.
- There has been a significant and documented increase in requests for job-search, rental, medical, and housing assistance.
- We are extremely concerned about the unintended consequences and unacceptable hardships to our most vulnerable residents.

Economic stress has an inverse impact on the County's and our partners' capacity to meet residents' needs because as service requests increase sharply, donations and availability of resources decline. The Human Services Council understands the need for sacrifice in the face of the severe budget shortfall. The community has made it clear to the Council that the consequences of many of these proposed LOBS reductions fall below our community's minimum acceptable standards for service quality or accessibility. Few of the proposed LOBS reductions are inconveniences. In fact, they affect our most fragile population's basic living and coping requirements.

Human Services Council

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## **The Council's Ranking of Proposed Lines of Business Reductions**

To assist the Human Services Council with reviewing and developing recommendations regarding the 167 proposed Human Services Lines of Business (LOB) reductions, the Council received testimony from nearly two dozen organizations and considered recommendations from all human services departments. We have categorized each of the 167 human services LOBS into one of three impacts:

- ***SIGNIFICANT impact (1)*** These potential reductions will not excessively jeopardize health, safety, or the overall continuum of services, but will still have a major service impact.
- ***SERIOUS impact (2)*** These proposed reductions potentially have unacceptable service system impacts. It is unclear at this time if our community can develop alternative service delivery approaches or identify expanded revenue sources.
- ***SEVERE impact (3)*** These proposed reductions should be unacceptable to Fairfax County. They will lead to unsafe conditions, unhealthy outcomes, and an impoverished continuum of care for residents. They reflect a loss of vital services that Fairfax County should not tolerate. The Council opposes these reductions, and recommends that you take these items off the table.

The HSC considered the following criteria in categorizing the LOBS:

- Was there an alternative?
- Was service eliminated or reduced?
- If reduced, increasing factors such as waiting time, was it to such a level that it poses a danger for human service clients?
- Will elimination compromise other services the Council deems more important?
- Will LOB loss endanger lives in the short run? In the long run?
- Will LOB loss significantly damage the human services infrastructure thereby leading to additional service losses?
- What are the effects of human service LOB losses across all of human services (e.g., transportation, training)?
- How did departments rank the LOBS?

The Council's rankings of the proposed LOBS reductions are included in the attached document.

Let us be clear: the Human Services Council recognizes that all these reductions will create difficulties, resulting in deterioration of needed services. However, the Council made a concerted effort in our recommendations to preserve basic service levels.

## **Areas of Particular Concern to the Council**

Fairfax County, like the Nation, faces difficult times for the foreseeable future. The Council appreciates the County Executive's thoughtful approach to address a potential shortfall of \$650 million in FY 2010. While the Council agrees that reductions to human services programs will be necessary to address this financial shortfall, we all need to be cognizant not only of the obvious impacts from these reductions to human services programs, but also of the related "ripple effects". In our discussions with the community, the following issues, speaking to the County's ability to maintain core Human Services areas and respond to emergency needs, emerged:

- **Pressures on Human Services.** There are two strands to this issue, current demographic trends in the County's population and the fresh pressures created by the economic downturn. The dramatic population growth Fairfax County has experienced over the past several years has been accompanied by a number of social challenges that impact human services. These include significant growth in our service population in areas such as foster care and juvenile offenders, as well as increased needs for affordable child care, housing, and health care. In addition, demographic changes also put pressures on the human services system in areas such as the need for supportive services for the elderly and their families. Exacerbating these trends is the need for *additional* social services as the economic downturn ripples through our own community. We see this most dramatically even now in food banks with bare shelves struggling to feed our needy citizens. The situation will become worse. We have obligations to which we need to respond to meet our responsibilities as a caring community.
- **The Penny for Affordable Housing.** A stable community starts with adequate and affordable housing. This fund has been used to preserve successfully more than 2,000 affordable housing units and thus sustain the accessibility of affordable housing, which is so vital to the health of our community and directly affects many human service programs and needs. The current economic conditions make this exactly the time when this initiative is needed more than ever. Therefore, the Council recommends that the County Executive continue to dedicate one penny of the real estate tax rate to housing affordability.
- **Unintended Impacts From Reductions.** The Human Services Council is concerned that reductions in one department produce a chain reaction of unintended consequences that have a significant compounding effect. The county needs to proceed very cautiously. Unraveling one program can have major corollary effects on other programs, jeopardizing the tenuous safety net of human services available to county residents.
- **Preserving the Human Services Safety Net**

The safety net of services, so vital to meeting the basic needs of our residents, is extremely fragile. This net is comprised not only of services the County provides directly, but a vast network of cooperating non-profit and faith community providers. The proposed LOBS reductions will accelerate the deterioration of services from all service deliverers. From the perspective of an individual who needs help in meeting basic needs, it does not matter who delivers assistance. The safety net is growing weaker now at the very time when the numbers of caseloads and service needs is increasing. The Human Services Council's ordering of the LOBs tries to ensure that the safety net of critical human service programs remains in place to supply the most basic needs of county residents. In so doing, the Council encourages efficiencies, program redesigns, strategies, and service delivery alternatives wherever feasible.

- **Increasing Human Services Caseloads and Workloads**

The needs of the community, and concurrently human services caseloads and workloads, grow inversely to a worsening economy. Fairfax County exceeds state caseload standards in Public Assistance, Coordinated Services Planning, and the Community Services Board. New applications for public assistance, primarily Food Stamps and Medicaid, have increased by over 41 percent since FY 2001. Public Assistance caseloads have also grown by more than 70 percent, increasing from about 29,000 cases in FY 2001 to almost 56,000 cases as of October 2008, primarily in response to changing economic circumstances.

- **Investing Wisely in Prevention Strategies**

If we want to avoid making things worse, we need to invest wisely in prevention strategies. Along with Self-Sufficiency, prevention strategies are a guiding principle of the human services system. Prevention-oriented services reduce the need for more costly and intensive emergency/crisis interventions in the future.

The Council stresses the importance of sustaining long-term commitments to prevention efforts because they are good public policy, cost-effective, and the most successful way to reverse negative trends. Prevention-oriented services encourage the development of family and community resources that increase the strength and stability of individuals, families, and communities. Fairfax County's prevention programs, in particular, leverage public resources to build upon the strengths of actively involved nonprofit, faith-based, and business communities. Prevention strategies and initiatives are especially effective tools to address comprehensively issues such as child care, housing, and gang prevention because they address the root causes of problems. A small investment now is a more effective application of resources than having to mitigate much more costly social problems in future years. Child care and Teen Center programs, among others, are excellent examples of investing in families and children now and reaping the benefits later. With the hounds of our current financial problems nipping at our heels, it is hard to focus on the future, but it is important. An ounce of prevention really is better and more cost effective than a pound of cure.

- **Concern for the Protection and Well-Being of Children**

The Council reminds the County Executive that we need to be especially cognizant in this budget cycle to protect children. A number of disturbing trends in our community reflect the complex needs of children. Instances of juvenile crime and substance abuse among youth, and the growth of protective services and foster care caseloads, all point to the need to provide supportive and protective services for children. The growing number of single-parent families and the prevalence of families in which all adults must work outside of the home lead to a greater need for affordable, accessible child care throughout the County. The Council strongly recommends maintaining funding for programs that provide a range of supportive and protective services for children (or child-level adults), including child care, health care, child protection, juvenile supervision, and substance abuse and violence prevention.

- **Maintaining Independence: the Availability of Long-Term Care and Other Assistance**

Helping our residents maintain their independence is a far more cost-effective strategy than the alternative of institutionalization. Here is a prime example of the cost-effectiveness of funding county services, with the service alternatives being far more expensive and disruptive to our community. The proposed service reductions in the LOBS is especially problematic, greatly worrying the Human Services Council. A growing number of persons and families in our community need some type of assistance to live independently, whether they are elderly persons trying to remain in their own homes or families trying to support aging parents or a handicapped child. Every year the need for such supportive services grows, and we can expect this trend to continue. Persons with functional physical or mental limitations can live independently with the proper support. Services such as adult day care and vocational and day support programs make it possible for intellectually challenged persons to continue living meaningful and productive lives in their homes and communities.

- **Supporting the Consolidated Community Funding Pool**

The Council and the community strongly support our investments through the Consolidated Community Funding Pool (CCFP). This is an extremely wise investment, productively leveraging millions of non-County dollars to serve thousands of our community residents with needed services. The Council heard testimony from several presenters that the CCFP is so vitally important to the health and well-being of our community that it should be excluded from the LOBS reduction process. The Human Services Council concurs. County funds for the CCFP have successfully leveraged additional community resources at a ratio of at least 1:3 for cash matches from non-County sources, in-kind services from volunteers, and contributions from the private sector, nonprofits, and faith community. Our community partners are on the front line tending to the effects of the economic downturn. They express great worry about their ability to continue serving the community. If they cannot do this, these services will become the direct responsibility of the County or go totally unmet.

- **Transportation is a Key Component of Providing Human Services**

Transportation is a critical component of self-sufficiency. Providing services without a means of accessing those services is ineffectual. The County provides transportation for thousands of people each year through various public and private service contracts, and several community-based organizations provide a variety of transportation services. However, everyday transportation continues to be an ongoing need for many individuals, especially the working poor, elderly, and persons with disabilities. The County needs to be very careful that LOBS reductions in transportation do not effectively eliminate other services.

## **Commitment to Addressing the Community's Human Services Needs**

The Human Services Council hopes that these considerations and the specific recommendations outlined in the attached tables will aid the County Executive in his deliberations on the FY 2010 proposed budget.

The Human Services Council notes that during our discussions with the community, several organizations presented a strong and urgent willingness to support increased taxes to help address the budget shortfall and to preserve core programs and services. Because this topic was raised several times by the community, the Council feels that it is important to inform the County Executive and the Board of Supervisors of this theme.

The Council notes how the human services system is continually developing new approaches to service delivery which better serve and meet the expectations of the community, especially in light of limited resources. Through strategic planning, revenue enhancement, service integration, process improvement, and performance management, the human services system has successfully found ways to maximize the return on the public's investment.

No organization is immune from the severe funding constraints that are occurring and are expected to continue for several years. Many of the fiscal constraints affecting Fairfax County are beyond our control, but we can control our response to these constraints. You and the community will need to make many difficult, possibly unpopular, choices. Yet, this arduous process also presents opportunities. For example, it reinvigorates the continuing efforts by the County and its employees to foster continuous improvement and initiative. These actions represent what we think are the best possibilities for mitigating the impact to the thousands of Fairfax County's most vulnerable residents who rely upon the human services from the County.

The Council urges caution so that budgetary decisions do not compromise the investment, momentum, and energy that the county and our partners have built in addressing human services needs in the community. Important endeavors such as preventing and ending homelessness, and preserving and developing affordable housing will suffer if this forward momentum is slowed or stopped altogether.

We must also look out for the nonprofit community, our crucial human services partners in leveraging community resources. The needs in our community are skyrocketing and we must ensure that our community's basic health, safety, welfare, housing, and sustenance needs are spared. These nonprofit organizations save the county money and service populations that are sometimes unreached by the broader safety net. The services they provide fill significant supply/demand service gaps. The financial health of our nonprofit partners is key to a vibrant community-support network. People's basic needs are at stake.

This is an ongoing process, and the Council will continue to work with Mr. Haywood and the Human Services Leadership Team to pursue mitigation strategies and potential service delivery alternatives. The Human Services Council will be an active participant in this process throughout the months to come.

Thank you for this opportunity.

Attachment

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cc: Human Services Council  
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Edward L. Long, Jr., Chief Financial Officer  
Human Services Leadership Team  
Susan W. Datta, Director, Department of Management and Budget